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Education Report

Virtual School Adds Choices and Flexibility

B.C.'s new virtual school, LearnNow BC, allows students to learn at any time, at any pace, and from any place. The website www.learnnowbc.ca features a course finder, a toll-free number, and even online tutoring. The Province invested nearly $1 million and has pledged another $5 million to expand and improve the service in time. [Read more]

Minister Bond launches LearnNow BC with Vancouver South junior hockey players Carter Rigby (left) and Mitch Callow, and Diana Watson, a Grade 11 student from the Langley Fine Arts School.

Message from Minister Shirley Bond

Minister Shirley Bond
Province of B.C.

As the MLA for Prince George-Mount Robson, I represent many rural schools and know first-hand the challenges they face – everything from declining enrolment to limited course offerings to recruiting and retaining teachers.

Last week, teachers, parents, and administrators from 42 school district met at the first-ever Rural Education Conference to discuss the challenges faced by their rural schools. The conference was a milestone because it featured local educators from across B.C. creating home-grown solutions to meet the unique needs of their rural schools.

To help rural educators continue to share their great ideas and best practices, the Province will create a Rural Education Network. The network will allow teachers and administrators in places like the Arrow Lakes school district to share what works for them with teachers and administrators in the Stechako Lakes school district – and the rest of rural B.C.

This increased communication and collaboration among educators will allow them to collectively find innovative ways to help our rural students achieve their goals.

The Province will also launch a new shared services website early in the new year where school districts can purchase supplies at cost or take advantage of existing government purchasing agreements for products and services. This new shared services website will let small, rural districts purchase supplies at prices often only available for larger urban districts.

The Rural Education Network and shared services website are just two of the innovative ways our government is continuing to support rural schools.

HOT TOPIC

The face of B.C. is changing.

Our urban population continues to outpace rural growth. Did you know that over 85 per cent of people now live in urban centres? In fact, well over half of all British Columbians live in the Lower Mainland.

Then there is declining enrolment. School districts estimate that they will have 7,000 fewer students this year – and 37,000 fewer students since 2001. This is part of an ongoing trend: this is the ninth year in a row enrolment has declined. And enrolment is expected to decline by a further 50,000 students over the next five years.

However, declining enrolment can be an opportunity, too. The School Community Connections program is opening unused and underutilized spaces in schools to benefit communities.

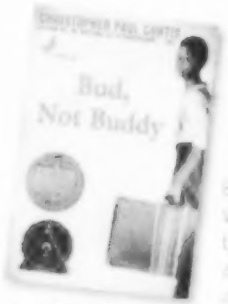
The changing face of B.C. is an opportunity to shape the new face of education, where urban and rural school districts find new and better ways to use technology.

The Rural Education Network will use technology to help educators in rural and remote schools share innovative solutions to unique challenges such as managing multi-grade classrooms, achieving success for Aboriginal learners, increasing community involvement, using electronic learning, and supporting students with special needs.

One of the most exciting uses of technology is LearnNow BC – the new virtual school. LearnNow BC links students to hundreds of courses offered by 42 B.C. school districts. Rural students will be able to find the courses they want and urban students will be able to find courses that fit their timetable and lifestyle.

Similarly, AskAway, a virtual reference service, connects all British Columbians with 80 librarians from 46 public libraries and 100 librarians from 26 post-secondary institutions, all in real time, and in an easy-to-use, live-chat format.

B.C. is changing. Its cities are rising and its population is aging. The key is seeing the opportunities among the challenges, working together, and using technology to best serve B.C. students.



Bud, Not Buddy
Christopher Paul Curtis

Reading Corner

Bud, orphaned at six, lives by his wits, and he isn't afraid to take risks. With only his memories of his mother and a few mementos that he believes will lead him to his father, Bud escapes from the orphanage and starts his search. Christopher Paul Curtis's award-winning book is an ultimately hopeful story suitable for students in grades 5–6.